

UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

FOR

**GAMING DEVICE HAVING MULTIPLE AWARD ENHANCING
LEVELS**

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GAMING DEVICE HAVING MULTIPLE AWARD ENHANCING LEVELS

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PRIORITY CLAIM

This application is a continuation and claims the benefit of U.S.
Patent Application No. 09/626,720, filed July 7, 2000.

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CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is related to the following commonly-owned co-
pending patent applications: "GAMING DEVICE HAVING
SEPARATELY CHANGEABLE VALUE AND MODIFIER BONUS
SCHEME," Serial No. 09/626,045, Attorney Docket No. 0112300-010;
15 and "GAMING DEVICE HAVING SELECTIVELY ACCESSIBLE
BONUS SCHEME," Serial No. 09/657,916, Attorney Docket No.
0112300-011.

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DESCRIPTION

The present invention relates in general to a gaming device, and more particularly to a gaming device having multiple award enhancing levels.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The popularity of a gaming device depends in part upon the level of enjoyment and excitement that the game provides to its players. Gaming device manufacturers constantly strive to make gaming devices that provide as much enjoyment and excitement as possible. Providing a bonus round in which a player has an opportunity to win potentially large awards or credits in addition to the awards associated with the base game of the gaming device is one way to enhance player enjoyment and excitement.

Known gaming devices having bonus rounds employ a triggering event that occurs during the base game operation of the gaming device. The triggering event temporarily stalls or halts the base game play and enables a player to enter a second, different game, which is the bonus game. The player plays the bonus game to its fruition, likely receives an award, and returns to the base game. In most instances, the bonus game or round is relatively short in relation to the time that the player spends playing the base game. The player

may play the bonus game or round a number of times while playing the base game of the gaming device.

An example of the bonus game or round just described is the TOP DOLLAR™ game, which is manufactured and distributed by IGT,
5 the assignee of this application. In the TOP DOLLAR™ game, the player plays a primary game until reaching the bonus round, which occurs when a combination of the reels of the gaming device matches a combination programmed into the controller of the gaming device. The player enters the bonus round, plays the bonus round to its fruition
10 and then returns to the normal or base game of the gaming device. There is no limit to the amount of times that the player can enter the bonus round.

Another example of the above described bonus game or round is disclosed in European Patent Application No. EP 0 945 837 A2 filed
15 on March 18, 1999 and assigned on its face to WMS Gaming, Inc. Here, the device operates in a basic game until a "start bonus" event occurs, which causes the device to shift to a bonus game. The player plays the bonus game by selecting and uncovering awards until the player selects and uncovers a bonus round terminator, at which point
20 the bonus round ends and the player returns to the base game.

In both of the examples, the gaming device randomly determines when the bonus round begins by incorporating certain symbols or combinations of symbols into the reels or random generation mechanism of the base game. Thus, while the player is

playing the base game, the player desires to obtain symbols or combinations thereof that yield base game awards. The player also desires to obtain the symbols or combinations thereof that enable the player to enter the bonus game or round.

5 It should be appreciated that but for the symbols that the base game generates to enable the player to enter the bonus round, known bonus games or rounds are relatively independent of, and have little interaction with, the base game. The European Patent Application No. EP 0 945 837 discloses a "bonus resource" that a player obtains during
10 the base game, which the player can thereafter apply during the bonus round. However, the level of interaction between the base game and the bonus game is limited to the function assigned to the bonus resource, such as overriding an event that would otherwise end the bonus round.

15 Other known games include bonus rounds which are generally self-contained and do not interact with the base game. Such bonus rounds award the player an additional award and then end. A particular bonus round has no further affect on the outcome of the base game or upon the outcome of a future bonus round. It is thus desirable
20 to create a bonus scheme or additional game that is separate and apart from the base game, but that operates along side or in conjunction with the base game. It is also desirable to have such a game that is separable from the base game, but that is on-going rather than self-contained. Providing an ongoing and interactive bonus or

additional game increases enjoyment and excitement because the player, in essence, plays two games wherein the player can be successful at either.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention overcomes the above shortcomings by providing an interactive, continuous bonus game that operates in conjunction with the base game of the gaming device and enhances the player's award. The game of the present invention provides and
10 displays a plurality of graduating modifiers (preferably multipliers) and designates or highlights one of the modifiers. When one or more activating symbols appear on the payline of the reels, the game uses the designated or highlighted modifier to change (preferably increase) the player's award. The present invention contemplates providing any
15 number of modifiers, each of which have a value and a function or action, and changing the modifiers based on one or more triggering events.

More specifically, the player plays the base game of the gaming device, which involves spinning a set of reels and randomly producing
20 and displaying a plurality of symbols on at least one payline. Certain symbols or sets of symbols predetermined and preprogrammed into the controller of the gaming device invoke or activate one or more of the modifiers. Each modifier has an associated activator, which is a symbol or set of symbols.

The activators activate the modifiers, which modify or operate upon a number of base game credits. The present invention contemplates two different modifiable groupings or numbers of base game credits. The first number of base game credits that the present invention contemplates modifying is the player's base game wager. That is, the present invention multiplies or modifies the player's wager (which is normally a number of credits) by the activated modifier.

The second number of base game credits that the present invention contemplates modifying is a payout from a base game award. When the player spins the reels, the symbols generated alone or in combination may produce a base game award for the player. When this happens, and the player also generates an activator, the present invention enhances or increases the award by modifying the award by the designated modifier associated with the activator.

The modifiers preferably have a value and a function or action. The value is typically a number while the function or action can be one of many things desired by the implementor. The modifiers can multiply, add or perform any other mathematical function to the number of base game credits, such as squaring them. The modifier can also perform other functions such as choosing a number of picks that the player will have from a later group of award producing selections.

After the present invention modifies a number of base game credits, the present invention resets itself by generating or designating at least one new modifier. This auto-regeneration is preferably

weighted so that the lowest modifier is not always designated and so that the highest modifiers are rarely designated. The higher value modifier provides an incentive, which provides excitement and enjoyment and motivates the players to play or continue playing the gaming device to achieve an enhanced payout.

The game also changes the highlighted or designated modifiers to modifiers having higher values. The reels of the present invention contain incrementor symbols or combinations. When a player receives an incrementor symbol or combination of symbols, the present invention changes the designated modifiers and displays the new modifiers in a modifier display. The present invention preferably increases the modifiers until the player wins or the highest valued modifier is designated, at which point the incrementors have no effect. The incrementors preferably change or reassign more than one or all the modifiers simultaneously, however, an incrementor can change only one modifier.

It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a gaming device with a bonus game that operates in conjunction with the base game of the gaming device.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a bonus game that is on-going rather than self-contained, and which increases the player's award as the player continues to play the gaming device.

Other objects, features and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the following detailed disclosure, taken in conjunction

with the accompanying sheets of drawings, wherein like numerals refer to like parts, elements, components, steps and processes.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

5 Fig. 1 is a front elevation view of one embodiment of the gaming device of the present invention;

 Fig. 2 is a schematic block diagram of the electronic configuration of one embodiment of the gaming device of the present invention;

10 Fig. 3 is a front elevation view of a general embodiment of the present invention containing the general elements of the present invention;

 Fig. 4 is a flow diagram of one embodiment of the present invention;

15 Fig. 5 is an enlarged front elevation view of the display of the gaming device that illustrates the modifiers of one embodiment of the present invention;

 Fig. 6 is a front elevation view of one embodiment of the gaming device having a display of the present invention and a set of reels displaying activators of the present invention; and

20 Fig. 7 is a front elevation view of one embodiment of the gaming device having a display of the present invention and a set of reels displaying incrementors of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Gaming Device and Electronics

Referring now to the drawings, Fig. 1 generally illustrates a gaming device 10 of one embodiment of the present invention, which is preferably a slot machine having the controls, displays and features of a conventional slot machine. Gaming device 10 is constructed so that a player can operate gaming device 10 while standing or sitting. However, it should be appreciated that gaming device 10 can be constructed as a pub-style table-top game (not shown) which a player can operate preferably while sitting. Gaming device 10 can also be implemented as a program code stored in a detachable cartridge for operating a hand-held video game device. Also, gaming device 10 can be implemented as a program code stored on a disk or other memory device which a player can use in a desktop or laptop personal computer or other computerized platform.

Gaming device 10 can incorporate any game such as slot, poker or keno in addition to any of their bonus triggering events which trigger the bonus game of the present invention. The symbols and indicia used on and in gaming device 10 may be in mechanical, electrical or video form.

As illustrated in Fig. 1, gaming device 10 includes a coin slot 12 and bill acceptor 14 where the player inserts money, coins or tokens. The player can place coins in the coin slot 12 or paper money in the bill

acceptor 14. Other devices could be used for accepting payment such as readers or validators for credit cards or debit cards. When a player inserts money in gaming device 10, a number of credits corresponding to the amount deposited is shown in a credit display 16. After
5 depositing the appropriate amount of money, a player can begin the game by pulling the arm 18, or pushing play button 20. Play button 20 can be any play activator used by the player which starts any game or sequence of events in the gaming device.

As shown in Fig. 1, gaming device 10 also includes a bet display
10 22 and a bet one button 24. The player places a bet by pushing the bet one button 24. The player can increase the bet by one credit each time the player pushes the bet one button 24. When the player pushes the bet one button 24, the number of credits shown in the credit display 16 decreases by one, and the number of credits shown in the bet
15 display 22 increases by one.

Gaming device 10 also has a paystop display 28 which displays at least one symbol from a plurality of reels 30. Gaming device 10 preferably contains three to five reels in mechanical or video form. Each reel 30 contains a plurality of symbols such as bells, hearts,
20 fruits, numbers, letters, bars or other images preferably corresponding to a theme of the gaming device 10. If the reels 30 are in video form, the gaming device 10 preferably displays the video reels 30 on the video monitor 32 instead of on the paystop display 28. The paystop display 28 of Fig. 1 displays only one row of symbols or payline.

Gaming device 10 can display multiple rows of symbols and thus multiple paylines. A payline is a plurality of paystops displayed on the paystop display 28 that are analyzed by the controller of the present invention to determine if a player has generated a winning symbol or symbols. Gaming device 10 preferably also includes speakers 34 for making sounds or playing music.

At any time during the game, a player may "cash out" and thereby receive a number of coins corresponding to the number of remaining credits by pushing a cash out button 26. When the player "cashes out," the player receives the coins in a coin payout tray 36. The gaming device 10 may employ other payout mechanisms such as credit slips redeemable by a cashier or electronically recordable cards which keep track of the player's credits.

With respect to electronics, gaming device 10 preferably includes the electronic configuration generally illustrated in Fig. 2, which has: a processor 38; a memory device 40 for storing program code or other data; a video monitor 32 or other display device (i.e., a liquid crystal display); a plurality of speakers 34; and at least one input device as indicated by block 33 such as the arm 18, play button 20, the bet one button 24 and the cash out button 26. The processor 38 is preferably a microprocessor or micro-controller-based platform which is capable of displaying images, symbols and other indicia such as images of people, characters, places, things and faces of cards. The memory device 40 can include random access memory (RAM) 42 for

storing event data or other data generated or used during a particular game. The memory device 40 can also include read only memory (ROM) 44 for storing program code which controls the gaming device 10 so that it plays a particular game in accordance with applicable
5 game rules and pay tables.

As illustrated in Fig. 2, the player preferably uses input devices 33 such as the arm 18, play button 20 or bet one button 24 to input signals into gaming device 10. The present invention can also provide a touch screen 46 and an associated touch screen controller 48
10 instead of a conventional video monitor 32. Touch screen 46 and touch screen controller 48 are connected to a video controller 50 and processor 38. A player can make decisions and input signals into the gaming device 10 by touching touch screen 46 at the appropriate places. As further illustrated in Fig. 2, the processor 38 can be
15 connected to coin slot 12 or bill acceptor 14. The processor 38 can be programmed to require a player to deposit a certain amount of money in order to start the game.

It should be appreciated that although a processor 38 and memory device 40 are preferable implementations of the present
20 invention, the present invention can also be implemented using one or more application-specific integrated circuits (ASIC's) or other hard-wired devices, or using mechanical devices (collectively referred to herein as a "processor"). Furthermore, although the processor 38 and memory device 40 preferably reside on each gaming device 10 unit, it

is possible to provide some or all of their functions at a central location such as a network server for communication to a playing station such as over a local area network (LAN), wide area network (WAN), Internet connection, microwave link, and the like. The processor 38 and
5 memory device 40 are generally referred to herein as the "computer."

With reference to Figs. 1 and 2, to operate the gaming device 10, the player must insert the appropriate amount of money or tokens at coin slot 12 or bill acceptor 14 and then pull the arm 18 or push the play button 20. The reels 30 will then begin to spin. Eventually, the
10 reels 30 will come to a stop. As long as the player has credits remaining, the player can spin the reels 30 again. Depending upon where the reels 30 stop, the player may or may not win additional credits.

15 Bonus Game Scheme

Referring now to Fig. 3, a general embodiment of the present invention is shown containing the general elements of the present invention. The gaming device has a paystop display 28 having a plurality of reels 30 forming one or more paylines, a separate video
20 monitor 32 and preferably a touch screen 46 (Fig. 2). The modifiers are shown generally by the numbers 54 and 54a, wherein there are two groups or sets of modifiers identified by the numbers 54 and 54a. The group 54 contains the modifiers 2x, 3x, 4x and 5x. The group 54a contains the modifiers 4x, 9x, 16x, and 25x. The present invention

contemplates providing one set or group of modifiers (e.g. only group 54) or providing a plurality of such groups (e.g. groups 54 and 54a). If the present invention provides more than one group, the groups can be related by a mathematical function, e.g., group 54a is the mathematical square of group 54. The gaming device 10 designates or highlights one of the modifiers from each of the groups 54 and 54a. The present invention contemplates lighting the designated modifier or employing any suitable method of communicating the designation to the player.

The modifiers of groups 54 and 54a modify a number of base game credits. In Fig. 3, the modifiers can modify the 10 credits shown in the credit display 16. In other embodiments, the modifiers can modify an award generated by the reels 30 in the paystop display 28. The modifiers of groups 54 and 54a modify the base game credits, discussed in detail below, when the player receives an activator, such as the "X" activator 58 on a payline of the paystop display 28. That is, after spinning the reels and receiving the "X" activator 58 on a payline, the game modifies the base game credits by one of the currently designated modifiers from the groups 54 and 54a.

The gaming device 10 designates new modifiers when the player receives an incrementor, such as the "+" incrementor 55 on a payline of the paystop display 28. The incrementor as well as the activator can be one symbol from a reel 30 or a combination of symbols from more than one reel 30. The incrementors change the designated modifier, preferably increasing the modifier value and

preferably still, increasing the modifier value to the next highest modifier. If a player thus receives the "+" "+" incrementor 55 on a
payline, the gaming device 10 preferably increases, for example, the
modifier of group 54 from 2X to 3X or the modifier from the group 54a
5 from 16X to 25X. As discussed below, the receipt of an incrementor
can increase modifiers from one or a plurality of modifier groups.
Further, the game can maintain the designated modifiers at the same
relative position for two or more groups (e.g. 2x and 4x) or at different
relative positions (e.g. 2x and 25x). It should be appreciated that if the
10 designated modifier is already at the highest position, i.e., 5x or 25x,
the receipt of an incrementor has no effect.

Modifiers

Referring now to Fig. 4, a flowchart of the bonus game
15 sequence of the present invention, generally indicated by the number
100, is shown wherein the present invention modifies, augments and
provides an ongoing game separable from the base game of the
gaming device. As shown by block 102, the first step of the bonus
game is also the first step of the base game, i.e., the gaming device
20 must receive money, coins or tokens from the player or issue credit to
the player, at which time the gaming device enables the player to play
the base game.

The present invention at all times designates a modifier or
modifiers as indicated by block 104. When the player inserts money

into the gaming device, the player preferably begins play with the modifier or modifiers that remain from the previous player. That is, when a player stops playing the gaming device of the present invention, the game preferably does not change the designated
5 modifiers before another player arrives. The present invention likewise maintains the designated modifiers after a player begins play until the modifiers are activated or changed as described below.

Referring also to Fig. 5, one embodiment of the present invention includes the modifiers illustrated in a modifier display 32a
10 with a game show type device 52. The modifier display 32a designates modifiers from two modifier groups, the "X" modifier group 54 (as with Fig. 3) and the "XX" modifier group 56. The present invention contemplates designating one modifier, two modifiers, as shown here, or designating any number of modifiers as desired by the implementor.
15 The device 52 and surrounding indicia are not essential to the invention and merely provide a theme in which to illustrate the modifiers and their associated values and functions. The present invention can employ any suitable illustration.

Referring still to Fig. 5, the modifier groups 54 and 56 of the
20 present embodiment each preferably include a plurality of modifiers and one designated modifier. The modifiers of groups 54 and 56 both multiply base game credits and are mathematically related. The present invention can, however, provide modifier groups having no functional or mathematical relationship. That is, different modifier

groups could multiply, add, square, etc. Moreover, modifiers in the same group can have no functional or mathematical relationship to other modifiers in the same group.

In Fig. 5, the "X" modifier group 54 contains the modifiers 54a through 54j having values 1 to 10, respectively. The "XX" modifier group 56 contains the modifiers 56a through 56j having values 1 to 100, respectively. Each group has ten modifiers wherein each "XX" modifier is a mathematical square of an "X" modifier. It should be appreciated that the present invention contemplates providing any number of modifier groups having any number of modifiers, each modifier having any value, and wherein the values of one modifier can have or not have a predetermined mathematical relationship to the values of another modifier.

Each modifier has a function, and different modifiers can have different functions. As alluded to by the symbols "X" and "XX," the modifiers can act as multipliers. That is, the gaming device multiplies the appropriate number of base game credits to determine the player's award as described below. The present invention also contemplates the modifiers adding to the number of base game credits. The present invention contemplates the modifiers functioning in any way that can increase or aid the increase of the player's award. For example, the modifiers can function as to define a number of turns, tries, or picks that a player has at an award generating means such as a group of award selections.

Referring again to Figs. 4 and 5, the present invention designates modifiers for each modifier group as indicated by block 104. In the embodiment of Fig. 5, the present invention designates one of the "X" modifiers, 54a through 54j, and displays the designation to the player. The present invention also designates one of the "XX" modifiers, 56a through 56j, to the player. In the embodiment of Fig. 5, the gaming device designates the modifiers in both groups at the same relative value or level (e.g., 5X and 25X); however, it should be appreciated that the present invention can designate modifiers having different relative values (e.g., 5X and 36X).

Referring to Fig. 6, one embodiment of the present invention is shown wherein the modifier display 32a of Fig. 5 is displayed on the video monitor 32 of Fig. 1. The modifier display 32a is preferably simulated, however, the display could also be mechanical and have a mechanical indicator or dial that points to the currently designated modifier. The present invention also contemplates a single video monitor that contains both the paystop display 28 and the modifier display 32a. For the sake of illustration, the present embodiment is described using separate stop and modifier displays.

Activators

Referring to Fig. 4 and to the embodiment of Fig. 6, upon a random generation of the reels 30 and a display of one or more symbols of the reels on the paystop display 28, as indicated by block

106, the game determines whether an activator symbol or set of symbols appears on a payline of the paystop display 28, which associates with and activates a designated modifier from the group 54. If not, then the present invention makes the same determination for the
5 designated modifier from the group 56. If the embodiment contains three designated modifiers, the game determines if an activator associated with the third modifier has appeared and so on until the present invention determines for each modifier whether the reels display an activator on a payline of the gaming device. The order in
10 which the present invention makes the determination for each designated modifier is not important.

An activator is preferably a symbol or combination of symbols. Each modifier has an associated activator, and one activator can activate more than one designated modifier. For example, the
15 preferred embodiment includes an activator for each group of modifiers, wherein the activator activates each group's designated modifier. The symbol or symbols comprising the activators preferably relate to a theme presented by the modifier display 32a. Referring to Fig. 6, the reel 30a contains an "X" activator 58 that activates the
20 designated "X" modifier of the group 54 and a "XX" activator 60 that activates the designated "XX" modifier of the group 56. In this embodiment, a single symbol activates the modifier, however, the present invention could require a combination, such as both the "X"

symbol of activator 58 and the "XX" symbol of activator 60 to activate the designated modifier.

Referring still to Figs. 4 and 6, if either of the predefined activators appear on a payline as indicated by diamonds 108 and 112,

- 5 the game modifies a number of base game credits using the designated modifiers shown in the display 32a as indicated in blocks 110 and 114, respectively. For example, if the "X" activator 58 appears on the payline, the present invention modifies a number of base game credits using the designated "X" modifier 54e of 5X as shown. If the
- 10 "XX" activator 60 appears on the payline, the game modifies a number of base game credits using the designated "XX" modifier 56e of 25X as shown.

- The number of base game credits acted upon or modified are either the amount of a player's wager, shown in the bet display 22, or
- 15 an amount that a player would otherwise win, i.e., a payout, from a winning symbol or combination of symbols displayed on the reels 30. The game preferably employs one or the other base game credits in conjunction with the modifiers and does not vary or switch from a bet to a payout or vice versa during the gaming device operation.

- 20 Referring to Fig. 6, the gaming device displays in the bet display 22 that the player has wagered five credits. If the number of base game credits of the present example is the player's bet, the player receives the "X" activator 58 upon random generation of the reels, the designated "X" modifier is 54e or 5X, and the modifier functions to

multiply the value by the credits, then the game of the present invention awards the player 25 credits (5 X 5) for receiving the "X" activator. It should be appreciated that substituting the receipt of the "XX" activator 60 in the above example would yield an award of 125 (5 X 25) credits to the player.

Alternatively, if the number of base game credits of the present example is a payout from a symbol or a winning combination of symbols, the receipt of an activator does not automatically signal an additional award. In this alternative, the player must also receive a winning combination. For example, if the oriental fan symbol 62 displayed on reel 30b of Fig. 6 did not alone or in combination with the "X" or the "XX" symbols yield an award, then the receipt of either of the activators 58 or 60 would have no effect. However, if the receipt of the oriental fan symbol 62 alone yielded a payout of ten gaming device credits, the receipt of the "X" activator 58 would boost the award to 50 credits (10 X 5) in the current example, while the receipt of the "XX" activator 60 would boost the award to 250 credits (10 X 25). Preferably, if both "X" and "XX" activators are obtained, only the highest of the activators is used; however, the game could use both activators such that in the example the award would be 1250 credits (10 X 5 X 25).

The gaming device of the present invention preferably predetermines at least some of the payout generating winning combinations of the reels 30 to include one or more of the activators,

so that the receipt of an activator has an effect on the outcome of an award. For example, the present invention can make a winning combination of symbols be the oriental fan 62 and the "XX" activator 60, or the fan, the "X" activator and the "XX" activator, etc.

5 Referring again to Figs. 4 and 6, after modifying game credits upon the receipt of an activator symbol as indicated by blocks 110 and 114, the game resets or randomly regenerates a new designated modifier as indicated by block 104. Random regeneration preferably occurs upon the modification of a number of base game credits. If the
10 number of credits is the player's wager, the random regeneration automatically occurs upon the receipt of an activator. When the credits acted upon are generated by a winning combination, the present invention preferably regenerates upon the receipt of a winning combination and an activator. Alternatively, the present invention
15 regenerates merely upon the receipt of an activator.

The present invention preferably employs a weighted system in randomly regenerating newly designated modifiers, so that it is more likely that the game will designate a lower value modifier to the player, but not the lowest value. For example, there can be a 5% chance that
20 the player begins with a designated "X" modifier of 1X, a 20% chance of 2X, a 25% chance of 3X, a 16% chance of 4X, a 10% chance of 5X, an 8% chance of 6X, a 6% chance of 7X, a 5% chance of 8X, a 3% chance of 9X and a 2% chance of 10X. It is preferably conceivable, yet unlikely, that a player would obtain an initial 1X, 7X, 8X, 9X or 10X. To

increase enjoyment and excitement, the present invention preferably entices the player with a designated multiplier greater than one and provides a challenge to the player to achieve the maximum multiplier.

5

Incrementor

Referring to diamond 116 of Fig. 4 and to another example of the present invention in Fig. 7, wherein the player does not receive an activator for any modifier as indicated in diamonds 108 and 112, the game then determines whether the player has received an
10 incrementor. The incrementor is preferably a combination of symbols although the incrementor can also be a single symbol. In one embodiment, each modifier has its own associated incrementor. In another embodiment, one incrementor re-designates more than one modifier. The gaming device preferably re-designates the modifier to
15 the next highest modifier. If a modifier group exists, the incrementor preferably re-designates the modifier to the next highest modifier within the group.

Referring to Fig. 7, the combination of symbols on a payline of the reels 30a, 30b and 30c that produces an incrementor is a ghost
20 symbol on each reel, or a blank, blank, blank, respectively. In this embodiment, all three reels of a payline must display the ghost symbol. In other embodiments a single ghost or two ghost symbols comprise an incrementor. It should be appreciated that the present invention can

use any symbol or combination of symbols to represent an incrementor and is not limited to the ghost symbol.

In the embodiment of Fig. 7, when the player spins the reels and randomly generates an incrementor 64 on a payline (i.e., the three ghost combination as shown on paystop display 28), the game determines, as indicated in diamond 118 of Fig. 4, whether the designated modifiers are the maximum modifiers available in a group. That is, the bonus game determines whether it can increase the designated modifiers. If the values can be increased, the game re-designates the modifiers of the groups 54 and 56 one level or to the next highest modifier as indicated by block 120.

In this example, the receipt of the incrementor 64 causes the bonus game to re-designate both the "X" modifier of the group 54 and the "XX" modifier of the group 56, however, the present invention contemplates the receipt of the incrementor 64 re-designating less than all the modifiers. In the modifier display 32a of Fig. 6, since the currently designated modifiers 54e and 56e (5X and 25X) are less than the maximum modifiers 54j and 56j, respectively, the bonus game re-designates the modifiers to the next highest modifiers, 54f and 56f.

Referring to Fig. 4, if no activators or incrementors appear on a payline of the reels as indicated in diamonds 108, 112 and 116, the game enables the player to spin again. If the player likewise receives an incrementor but the designated modifiers are already at their maximum, as indicated in diamonds 116 and 118, the game enables

the player to spin again. Third, if the player receives an incrementor and the designated modifiers are not already at their maximum, then the present invention changes the modifiers as indicated by block 120, and the bonus game enables the player to spin again as indicated by

5 block 106.

While the present invention is described in connection with what is presently considered to be the most practical and preferred embodiments, it should be appreciated that the invention is not limited to the disclosed embodiments, and is intended to cover various
10 modifications and equivalent arrangements included within the spirit and scope of the claims. Modifications and variations in the present invention may be made without departing from the novel aspects of the invention as defined in the claims, and this application is limited only by the scope of the claims.

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